chester from the Exchange to the Leeds telegraph of the Victoria station, whence that line is laid to Normanton station, through which the Manchester Exchange will be brought into electro-magnetic *rapport* with that of London, in course of two or three weeks, when the establishment of a like connection with Liverpool will be commenced without delay.—— There are now, it appears, no less than 1,575 miles of telegraph in operation throughout the United States, besides 4,974 miles more, which are already under contract, and in process of construction so as to be completed in 1848,—making, in all, 6,549 miles of telegraphic interweavement to be completed next year.

THE NATIONAL BUILDERS' GUILD.

SIR,—Permit me to lay before your readers the following suggestions for the establishment of a national society for regulating wages, supplying employment, relieving the sick, &c. during temporary illness, and for affording permanent pecuniary assistance to aged and infirm members, by a system of mutual life insurance.

The society to consist of masters and men in every department of building, whether under the direction of architects or civil engineers, and to include every description of persons engaged in decorating or furnishing buildings.

I would propose, that, in every corporate town in the kingdom, a trade council should be formed, which might consist of as many persons as there are town councillors of the corporate body; the members of this council to be elected by members of the society resident and working in the town, or whose names are registered in the books of the trade council of that town. The trade council in every corporate town would keep a book for registering the names of members, arranged under their respective trades. The town in which a member is first entered should never be changed for that of any other in which he may afterwards reside,—if he removed elsewhere, he should always be known as a member of the trade council of the town in which he was originally entered. All receipts and payments to his account would be made through the council of the town in which he was residing, to the central or metropolitan council in London, where duplicate books of every town council would be kept, and in which an account would be opened with every member of every trade council in connection with the society. The members of the society would be provided with a book by the metropolitan council, so printed and made as to prevent a forgery of it by any one. This book would contain a copy of his original entry into the society, and of his money account with it; it would also be his certificate of membership when presented at the trade council of any town in connection with the society. A member of The National Builders' Guild, in search of employment, would, as a matter of course, apply to the trade council of the town at which he had arrived, and the presenting of his book would prove him to be a member of the guild. Every working member, when seeking employment from a master member, should have the preference over others who are not members of the guild: I do not mean that there should be any thing compulsory, but simply an acknowledgment of kindly feeling on account of membership betwixt master and man. There will, of course, be rules and regulations required, and which must be so drawn up as to make it the interest of both parties to observe them.

I would propose that the metropolitan, or central trade council, should consist of a chairman and nineteen councillors, which is, I believe, the number of parliamentary members in the metropolitan districts. This council would be elected by the councillors of towns, in the same manner as they themselves were elected—that is, by voting papers, to be transmitted by post or otherwise, one-third going out of office under the same regulation as in the elections under the municipal law. In the metropolitan council would be vested the power of regulating wages, which would be binding on all masters and men in connection with the guild,—the data for these regulations would be, an annual report, in this and other matters, from the several trade councils of towns. The management of the funds of the guild would also be under their exclusive control; no sum exceeding a certain amount, or beyond a fixed period, as I have explained elsewhere, could be continued unless sanctioned by an order from the central council.

That portion of the plan of the National Builders' Guild which relates to the mutual insurance of its members, will be best undertaken by those conversant with such matters. A plan, which I believe to be somewhat similar, was established by the commercial travellers a very few years since, and is now in a most prosperous condition, and I see no reason why a similar one could not be carried out by the National Builders' Guild. My view of it is, that annuities might be granted under the following circumstances: namely, for life in case of infirmity produced by accident, or any cause incident to art, trade, &c., over which the individual had no control; infirmity from old age, to be fixed at a period rendered liable by the nature of the employment—the allowance to be in proportion to the time of life fixed upon as an old-age term; and in case of the death of the parties before the expiration of the term of old age, the immediate relative of such party to have an interest in the remainder of the term. Any break or discontinuance of the payment of the individual's subscription should not affect his claim to ultimate relief, but it would lengthen the period, or reduce the amount, in proportion to the time during which he ceased paying.

I am, Sir, &c. HENRY LIDDELL.

Beverley Road, Hull, May, 1847.

SCENERY AND DECORATION OF THEATRES.

LIGHTING THE STAGE.

"The production of optimum — incongruity — in harmonious combination is little short of a crime against society. The perfect of an opportunity to set before the general eye that which is harmonious [illegible] fitting, beautiful — is only less [illegible] degree." Builder's [illegible] ante, p. 264.

SIR,—If I ere now entertained some little hesitation to set before the critical eye of your numerous readers that which not only I myself, but others highly competent, have been led, by experimental knowledge, to regard as both harmonious and fitting, beautiful and brilliant, in the place of what is, by comparison, inharmonious, incongruous, and ugly, in the management of the light in theatres,—the peculiar applicability of the passage just quoted from THE BUILDER to the half-formed intention of addressing you on a subject in which much of what is either beautiful or ugly, either harmonious or discordant, may at least be capable of displaying itself, at once dispels all hesitation, and points me out the imperative line of duty in this particular instance.

Without further preface, then, I may, in the first place, remark, that amongst the many judicious suggestions proposed in the discourses of the 'Decorative Society' on the 'Scenery and Decoration of Theatres,' there is one for the production of general and harmonious as well as brilliant *effect* in scenic composition, the suggestion of which I looked for in vain while perusing the series of papers lately reported in THE BUILDER; and it therefore lately struck me, that as the idea in question has been tested by experiment, carried out at my own suggestion, and under my own eye, though for behoof of a managerial acquaintance in the provinces, it might be well to draw particular attention to the subject now, that it may opportunely meet with a fair consideration, in coincidence with all those minutiæ, every one of which, however trifling *per se*, ought to be pointedly regarded and attended to in the production and enhancement of that entire, harmonious, beautiful, and brilliant illusion, whose effect, occasionally, even the merest trifle of neglect may be sufficient at once and wholly to dispel.

The idea in question, however, is one connected, as I have already hinted, not so much with the production of the scenic illusion itself, as with the infusion of a brilliancy, and yet a pure and chastened serenity, of general effect throughout that scenic illusion, whether it regard the scenery itself, the drapery and decoration, or the countenances and expression of the *dramatis personæ*.

I had often been struck with the classical or picturesque expression thrown over the features of even a very plain and inelegant countenance by the elevation of the artificial light, when alone reflected on it, from a point *exclusively above its level*. Let any one, for instance, place a mirror before his own face, and elevate the candle, as the only light by which it is to be seen, to various levels, higher or lower, before it; and he will at once perceive, that as the shadows come to fall *exclusively downwards*, a classical elegance and even beauty of effect will be shed over even the most rugged countenance. Of course, I do not mean that the light be elevated directly above the head, but immediately in front of it, at an angle, probably, of forty-five degrees, *so that the expression of no feature be lost*.

Then, again, I had also often admired the purity and serenity, as well as brilliancy of effect produced on colours and on scenery under the like circumstances,—an effect which every one must have observed in this peculiar mode of managing light for scenic display,—so far as regards mere colours and shades, or these with forms,—in the windows of jewellers, drapers, &c.; and,—so far as regards perspective or scenery,—in picture galleries, where, I need scarcely add, the light in general is also made to descend exclusively from above.

On the other hand, while in a theatre, and especially from the pit, I have frequently been annoyed and disgusted with the effect of the unnatural glare of light from the foot lights, particularly on the faces of those on the stage. The false and unnatural effect thus produced, every one must have remarked. Why, the very cavernous interior of the nostril of even the most beautiful countenance, which nature discreetly casts into shade, is thus explored with most unmerciful, trying, and by no means beautiful distinctness. But I need not further enlarge on those reasons which led me to endeavour to get rid altogether of foot-lights, and to substitute a more natural and graceful as well as more brilliant and effective illumination of the persons and the scenery on the stage. I consulted, or rather advised with, Mr. Murray, the able manager of the Edinburgh Theatres, on this point: but he was too much wedded to established practices, or did not accurately judge of the general effect of the proposed improvement, although he admitted that it was most natural that the whole flood of light should primarily descend from above. An opportunity occurred, however, as I have hinted in the outset, and I eagerly embraced it, although strongly dissuaded by various sceptical critics from any interference with what they insisted could not be helped or improved, what was very well as it was, what would never be submitted to either by actors or spectators, *et cetera*, and so forth. Nevertheless, I did realize my own idea, and that too successfully; and what was more, to the satisfaction both of actors and spectators; and amongst the latter, by the way, was one with whose name many of the professional readers of THE BUILDER must be acquainted, namely, Mr. Errington, civil engineer, who happened to be attracted to the theatre in question by a course of scientific lectures, which he, amongst others, did me the honour to attend. Mr. Errington, I remember, while conversing on the subject with me, expressed his entire approval of the principle, and even suggested improvements of it, which unfortunately I had it not then in my power to carry out. That principle, as I have already virtually explained, consisted in the entire removal of the foot-lights, and the bold substitution of a central congeries of lights in the very body of the house (a small one certainly) and almost in the place usually occupied by the chandelier, with a reflector sufficiently large and powerful to turn the whole flood of light upon the stage, at about an angle of 45 degrees. A second congeries was found necessary, however, at a like elevation, but within the proscenium, or above and behind the general range of the actors' heads, to aid in the proper and uninterrupted display of the scenery on the like principle, the complete design for which display comprehended the systematic use of scenery so illuminated also from behind as to give the diaramic effect, as far as possible. The experiment was carried out, at all events, to a sufficient extent to prove, not only its practicability, but its great superiority to the usual method of lighting the stage; and I believe that nothing else is requisite to the most brilliant realization of this striking novelty in all its details, but the well-filled treasury of a metropolitan theatre.

J. E. D.

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